



## PROPOSED ACTION

### BIG BEND REROUTE OF THE FLORIDA NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

### U.S. FOREST SERVICE SOUTHERN REGION FLORIDA NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL MADISON, TAYLOR, LAFAYETTE COUNTIES, FLORIDA

#### BACKGROUND

In 1983, Congress officially added the FNST to the National Trails System through an amendment to the National Trails System Act of 1968. In addition to the designation of the FNST, the amendment identified the Forest Service as Federal Administrator of the Trail, and this responsibility has been delegated to the Southern Regional Forester. The Florida National Scenic Trail currently extends over 1,500 miles across the state of Florida.

As required by the National Trails System Act,<sup>1</sup> the FNST Comprehensive Plan was finalized in 1986 to guide planning, development, management, and protection of the FNST.<sup>2</sup> Besides meeting objectives described in Public Law 90-543 of the National Scenic Trail Systems Act, the 1986 FNST Comprehensive Plan requires that the trail be consistent with applicable state and federal laws, regulations and higher order plans regarding sanitation, safety, handicapped accessibility, cultural resources, the Endangered Species Act, water quality, and planning.<sup>3</sup> Additional desired FNST criteria include maximizing opportunities to view and experience the unique physical and cultural environments of Florida, providing a broad range of recreational interests and opportunities, minimizing resource and private land ownership impacts, and minimizing costs.<sup>4</sup> An amendment to the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the

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<sup>1</sup> National Trails System Act, available at: [http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5316971.pdf](http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5316971.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> USDA Forest Service, National Forests in Florida, Florida National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan, available at: [http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5356779.pdf](http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5356779.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Id. at 18.

<sup>4</sup> Id. at 18, 19, 20.

National Forests in Florida<sup>5</sup> provides additional guidance for the desired condition and authorized uses of the FNST outside of the proclaimed boundaries of the national forests.<sup>6</sup> More background information on the FNST may be found at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/fnst/land-resources-management>

## PROPOSED ACTION

The USDA Forest Service, (hereafter called the Forest Service), in partnership with the Florida Trail Association, has proposed a project for the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST). Specifically, the Forest Service proposes administratively re-designating a section of the FNST routing and planning corridor from its current alignment as a road-shoulder walk to a more permanent location mostly through state public lands. This reroute will replace the 50 miles of dangerous roadwalk with more than 50 miles of existing public trails, greatly increasing opportunities for users to experience the FNST and designating a safer route than on a road. Figures 1 and 2 below show the current and proposed routes. This project enhances the agency's ability "to provide for the maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass," as outlined in the National Trails System Act (16 USC 1242(a)(2)). Information and documents are available on the project website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=58313>) or upon request.

## PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose of the proposed Big Bend reroute is to increase public safety and improve user experience by moving the trail from a potentially unsafe road walk to existing trails and administrative roads on predominately state-owned public lands between Twin Rivers State Forest and the Aucilla River Wildlife Management Area. This reroute will also maximize trail protection and permanency and better align designated FNST routes with the nature and purposes of the Florida National Scenic Trail.

According to the 1986 FNST Comprehensive Plan, the trail route should provide a broad range of recreation interests and opportunities, minimize resource and private land ownership impacts, maximize functional relationships, and minimize costs<sup>7</sup>. The proposed Big Bend reroute will move the trail and trail planning corridor from the public road shoulder to a series of connected state-owned lands including state forest lands, two state parks, and several state wildlife and water management units. This change is safer for trail users compared to the current road walk (though the proposed route also includes some less traveled/ administrative roadwalk), and the proposed route highlights the undeveloped Big Bend coastline, natural springs and public lands

<sup>5</sup> USDA Forest Service, Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for National Forests in Florida (1999), available at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/florida/landmanagement/?cid=stelprdb5269793>

<sup>6</sup> USDA Forest Service, Amended Forest Plan Page 4-34a, 4-34b, 4-34c, Management Area 4.6, available at: [http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/fsbdev3\\_007259.pdf](http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fsbdev3_007259.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> USDA Forest Service, National Forests in Florida, Florida National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan, available at: [http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5356779.pdf](http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5356779.pdf) Id. at 18, 19, 20.

open to recreational opportunities. The route will retain the Aucilla Wildlife Management Area section of trail as a unique spur trail of the FNST.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

A description of the location review and recommendation was posted to the National Forests in Florida website in June, 2016<sup>8</sup>. The routing study was a culmination of land manager and partnering organizations' analysis of available alternatives within the location area. The Forest Service has received letters of support from the land managing agencies and communities within the reroute location. Our partners at the Florida Trail Association have done extensive public scoping through membership surveys, four separate articles in their print and digital magazines, along with a formal endorsement of the project from the board of directors. The Forest Service led, Florida National Trail Coalition, convenes twice annual in meetings open to the public. This reroute has been an agenda topic for the past five years. Furthermore, the proposed relocation was published through the Florida State Parks, Office of Greenways and Trails Priority Maps public workshop series and presented to Florida Trail Association Chapter Meetings held at several locations throughout the state. Although we did receive one comment supporting maintaining the original planning corridor, we did not receive any substantive comments from the public scoping process.

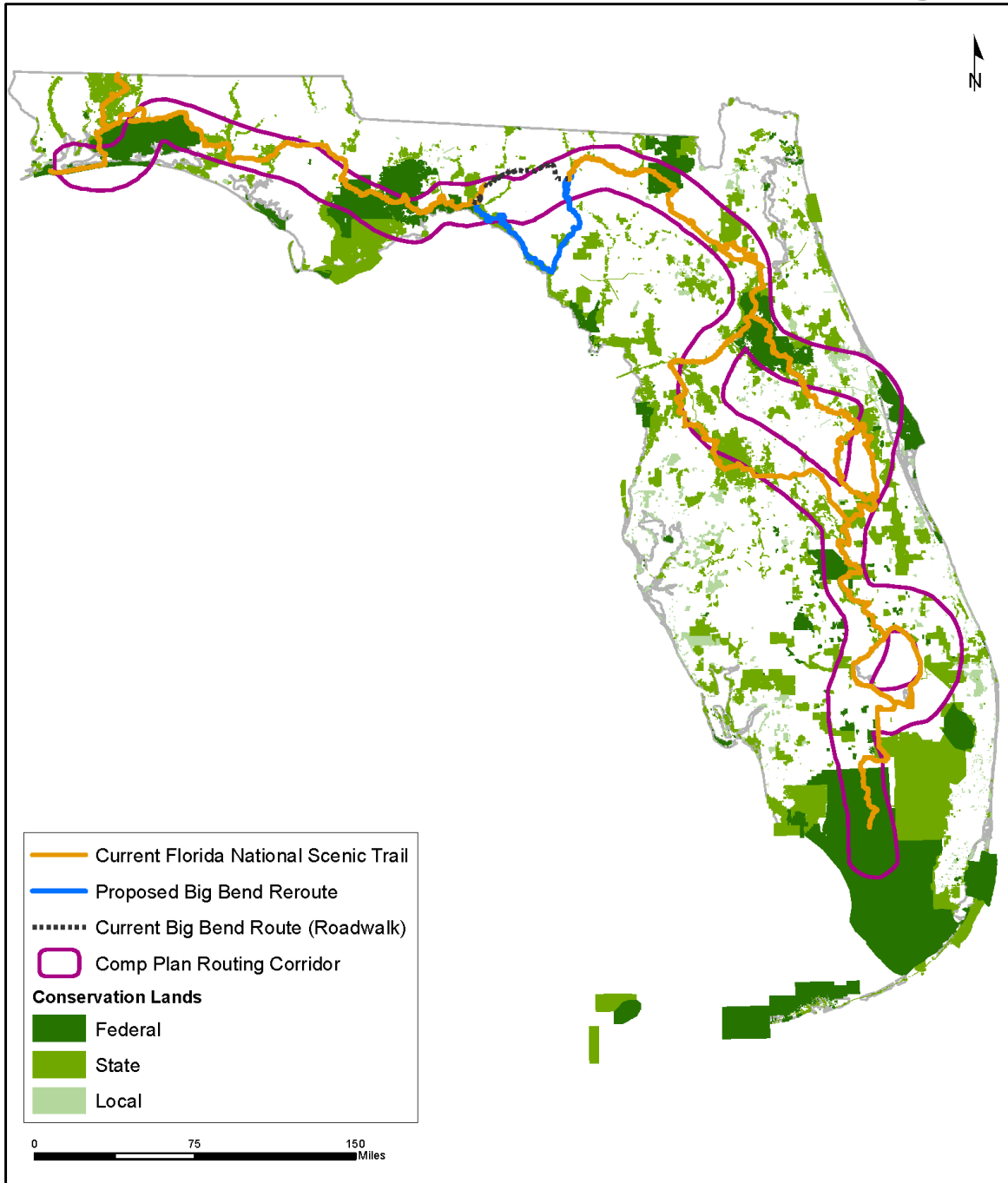
Given the extensive public and interagency involvement over the past several years, there will be no additional formal opportunities for public comments.

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<sup>8</sup> Florida National scenic Trail Corridor Location Review: Twin Rivers State Forest to Aucilla River  
[https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/fseprd562991.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd562991.pdf)



# Florida National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan Routing Corridor



Created: 6/12/2020

Figure 1. Planning corridor and route of the FNST, showing the proposed change in the Big Bend region.

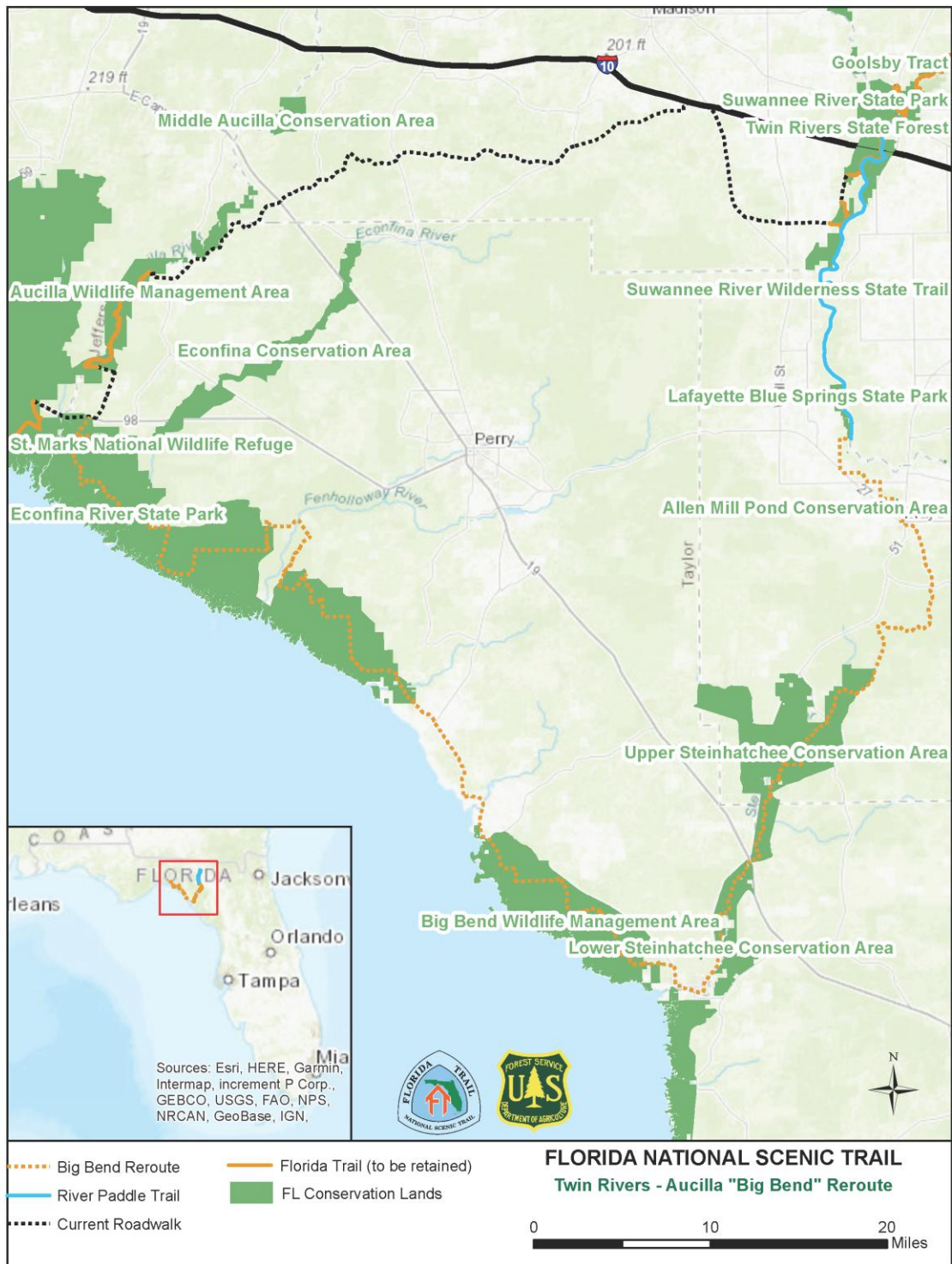


Figure 2. Detail showing Big Bend region current and proposed FNST routes.